

SAN ANTONIO Early ON School Readiness Project



The School Readiness Project, sponsored by the City of San Antonio and operated by the Department of Community Initiatives, began in October 2000 to support core issues of Early Childhood Education and family strengthening. The project originated in a community partnership under Better Jobs for San Antonio. The Better Jobs Initiative Task Force Early Childhood Committee formed a collaboration between school districts, early childhood education professionals, parents and community organizations such as the Smart Start Corporate Collaborative, the San Antonio Urban Systemic Initiative, Alamo Workforce Development and United Way.

The premise of the School Readiness Project is that what children learn before entering school has a big impact on how well they do in school. This, in turn, will have a great impact on how successful they are as adults, all of which leads to a better economy and a better quality of life for all San Antonians. Support for the community-wide effort focusing on young children to help create the workforce of tomorrow is generated in part by research. The Children's Defense Fund has shown that 33% of children enter kindergarten unprepared. Also, recent research has shown that for every \$1 invested in early childhood education, there will be a \$4.47 increase in economic activity for the San Antonio community.

Based on a survey of local employers as to what skills are required in the current workforce and with input from the Better Jobs committee, the School Readiness Guidelines were created, defining skills that are recognized as contributing to future school success. The skills are organized in three categories: Communication Skills, Problem Solving Skills and Life Skills. The School Readiness Guidelines, with suggested activities and resources, are summarized in a brochure that has been widely disseminated (over 100,000 copies). The brochure is available in both English and Spanish versions.

The project encompasses seven school districts. A major component of the project is providing linkages between specific child care centers and the elementary schools those centers feed into. The City of San Antonio currently contracts with six agencies to implement the project in eighteen elementary school neighborhoods. Each elementary school serves as a model site and is clustered with two child care centers. Early childhood providers and elementary school staff participate in collaboration meetings arranged by City delegate agency representatives for the purpose of aligning curriculum and communicating on school readiness activities. The model schools also serve as a base for neighborhood events to promote awareness among families and to generate interest in attending workshops to help

strengthen parents in their role as their child's first teacher. In addition, area business within the elementary school neighborhoods are asked to support the school readiness effort by distributing copies of the School Readiness brochure to customers and posting information about upcoming events. Other important project activities include technical assistance to improve the quality of preschool child care classrooms. Also, intergenerational volunteers are involved with small groups of children to facilitate activities reinforcing communication skills, problem solving skills and life skills.

The San Antonio area public television station, KLRN-TV, with the assistance of a public relations firm, created a community-wide media campaign, *Early ON*, to focus parents' attention on the importance of teaching a child early on in life. The *Early ON* media campaign, officially launched in May 2001, includes print, voice and video public service announcements to disseminate School Readiness information. It is estimated that overall, at a total of 92% of the San Antonio community has viewed *Early ON* media messages. The *Early ON* media campaign utilizes the 65-Smart telephone information line, an example of the partnering that is characteristic of this project. All *Early ON* materials are broadcast in both English and Spanish.

The visible results of this new project are encouraging. As of April 2003, the following outcomes were achieved: over 100,000 School Readiness brochures distributed, 590 teachers educated on School readiness, a total of 6,083 parents educated on kindergarten readiness techniques and 3,604 children (in participating School Readiness model schools and child care centers) displaying mastery of kindergarten readiness skills.

A critical outcome the project hopes to achieve is to positively impact the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) scores of children who have participated in school readiness activities in preschool settings and within their homes. An important collaborative partner with the City of San Antonio is the University of Texas at San Antonio, College of Education and Human Development. Data collected through qualitative and quantitative research methods will help DCI plan programs that better meet the needs of children and families in San Antonio. The School Readiness Project is currently working towards creation of a standardized curriculum for childcare centers that is aligned with the Texas Education Agency's Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and the Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines.

<p><i>For more information: Please contact The City of San Antonio Department of Community Initiatives Children's Resources Division (210) 246-5223</i></p>
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